

# Letter from Taizé

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## How can we welcome them?

Every Sunday this question comes up at Taizé. How can one welcome those who have come great distances, who are tired in addition to being lost, and who find it is difficult to make themselves understood?

Recently, parishes in many parts of Europe were asking themselves the same question when they opened their life to a new adventure: welcoming someone who had come from another continent. Welcoming someone who had come with empty hands perhaps, but with so much life to share.

When this question arises, what really counts is being open to appreciate each person as someone who is unique. An attitude of welcome becomes reciprocal when people listen to one another. As an Austrian girl put it:

In our small group this year, I have learnt how to listen better. Perhaps it is because all of us made an effort to be ourselves, and stuck to what was really important and accessible for everyone. What we all wanted was to see more clearly: to rediscover an eagerness and joyfulness for our daily life. And that is what happened, because we listened to each other with trust, silence, respect and friendship, without risking hurting another by our comments."

### God who welcomes

God has always been the one who welcomes. As soon as God created human beings, Scripture says, he planted a garden in order to receive them. To live is to be welcomed. God welcomes us on the earth, in "the land of the living". The earth is beautiful because of the hospitality of God.

But there is more. There are places on earth which bear the fine name of "house of God". God does not need a house to live in, but where he can be welcomed. For he has a particular concern for those who are nowhere at home. And he knows that we, all of us, are sometimes like strangers on our own earth. In his house, in common prayer and in silent adoration, God welcomes

### Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me

The God who welcomes, is himself, in Christ, a stranger on the earth. He arrives as a small child who asks for the attention of others. John the Baptist welcomed Christ by his burning expectation, the Virgin Mary by the love of a mother's heart, the Apostles by listening to his word.

Thinking of our time, when he would be hidden from our eyes, Christ said, "Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me." (Mt 10) and "What you have done to one of these little ones who are my brothers, you have done to me" (Mt 25). Those who set out without knowing where they will be welcomed and those who risk welcoming others, are at one with Christ. Where welcome is offered, there lies a "house of God and gateway to heaven" (Gn 28). For "it is through hospitality that some people have welcomed angels without realizing it" (Heb 13). □

EUROPEAN MEETING IN ROME: PAGES 2 and 3

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## Inter-continental meetings at Taizé



As people arrived during the summer, they could see at a glance that something had changed.

Faces from every corner of the world welcomed them with a flower and a bowl of tea. The intercontinental dimension was evident through the African and Asian clothes, and through the huge paintings on rough cotton fabric, inspired by places all over the world.

### Fire and water

The church seemed to have disappeared, submerged in the envelope of four tents which had been added to extend it. An Indian lamp was placed where the tents met the church building; after the Bible reading, children with candles went to light the seven wicks while everyone sang "The Lord is my light and salvation." At the meeting in Madras two years ago, common prayers began in the same way.

On the left of the church, underneath the trees, a small chapel has been built with nailed wooden planks. It is completely open behind, and on the top there is a bulb as on many Orthodox churches (reminding us of the celebration of the thousand years of the Russian Church); inside there are some icons and a small fountain. In this Chapel of the Spring, anyone can go to pray for inner healing.

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## Meeting to prepare

Between the summer meetings at Taizé and the European Meeting at the end of the year, the "pilgrimage of trust on earth", will comprise many simple visits and meetings undertaken by people in their own surroundings.

Three visits could be made with the letter "Living Springs" in order to discover one's own church and neighbourhood: "Joy, Simplicity, Mercy" — what places near me do I associate with these three values of the beatitudes?

For example:

Going to families with many children, or to children's home, to draw some pictures for children on other continents — Joy.

Making contact with those near us who lack basic necessities. Or visiting those who have chosen to live very simply in order to share with others and to welcome — Simplicity.

Visiting a hospital, a hospice, the home of an old person, a prison, in order to be welcomed oneself by those who live with suffering or in loneliness — Mercy.

Before making such visits, one could pass a long period of silence in a church, reading the corresponding passage in "Living Springs". Afterwards, a way can be found to share with the whole parish what the visits have meant. □

## A prayer with children

During the European Meeting, there will be a special prayer with children. A prayer like this, that brings together people of all ages, is usually full of improvisation and freshness. This is how one evening in Turin they held a prayer especially open to children:

We wanted children to lead the prayer. Beforehand we spent half an hour with them and their parents. Each child received a lighted candle. A story introduced the prayer, then there were songs, a reading from the Gospel, a time of silence, lots of improvised, personal prayers mostly spoken by children. At the end, each of them left their candle near the cross before going out, while the grown-ups remained for a prayer vigil around the cross.

The prayer was strikingly beautiful for adults as well. While we were preparing it we were thinking about what it meant and why we wanted to do it. We thought of this phrase from the Letter from Madras: "All through life, who is not surprised to find themselves saying to God, 'Listen to my prayer, the prayer of a child?'" We should all pray more simply, and, following the children's example, with an attitude of trust. To adults, God appears unknown, invisible and so far away! Children know how to find Jesus as someone so near and present, like a friend — what a surprise!" □

## The catacombs and the wellsprings of faith

Going to pray in the catacombs, the underground burial places outside the city-centre, can enable us to sense something of the life of the earliest Christians.

Up to the 2nd century, Christians buried their dead in pagan cemeteries, thus the apostle Peter was buried at the Vatican and Paul along the Via Ostiensis. Then they had their own "resting places" as they were called, which, as time went by, became real labyrinths several floors deep. These are the catacombs.

The symbols and frescoes on the tombs, the walls of the passages and in the chapels are some of the most ancient expressions of the life of the Church. Besides the inscriptions of name and age, or signs showing the profession of the dead, there are frescoes expressing faith in the Risen Christ: a picture of the Good Shepherd, scenes of Baptism and the Eucharist, the ancient sign of the ikhthus (greek word for fish, which contains the initial letters of the words of the confession of faith: Jesus Christ, Saviour of the world).

When the catacombs were no longer used as burial places, Christians continued to go there to pray. Pilgrims came from all over Europe knowing that martyrs were buried there.

To pray in communion with those who have gone before us in faith and who have given themselves right to the end in their commitment for Christ, stimulates us to give our lives. Rather than making us nostalgic for the early days of the Church, such a pilgrimage can make us more attentive to the One who is risen and present in the world today. Just as the martyrs of those times, many of whom died in the Coliseum, we seek to trust in these words: "Stay faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2.10). A pilgrimage there can also be a time to remember the witnesses of the faith everywhere in the world today, especially those who come close to martyrdom.

As we pray, we can be helped by the words of the early Christians, like St Clement, bishop of Rome, who died as a martyr towards the end of the 1st century. The basilica (now underground) which bears his name is very close to the Coliseum. It contains one of the most ancient frescoes of Mary with the child Jesus as well as the tomb of Cyril, a monk from Constantinople who with his brother Methodius opened the Gospel to the Slavonic peoples. Clement left behind him this prayer which he wrote during the persecutions of Domitian; words that rekindle our trust in God:

*"We have put our hope in you,  
you have opened the eyes of our hearts.  
You raise up the humble  
and topple the powerful.  
Be our help and our defender.  
Save the oppressed,  
watch over the weak,  
restore those who have fallen,  
heal the sick.  
Feed those who are hungry,  
give freedom to prisoners.  
And may all peoples recognize  
that you alone are God,  
that Jesus Christ is your child,  
and that we are your people."* □



***F**or the first time, many young people from other continents will take part in a European Meeting. Their participation had a great impact on the summer meetings at Taizé and it will certainly be likewise in Rome.*

*Above all, the meeting will be a sharing in the life of the Church: with families who welcome in their homes, with the parishes, with Pope John-Paul II during a prayer in St Peter's. We will be visiting a Church that is preparing a diocesan synod with the aim of deepening its sense of mission and community. Last June, one of the auxiliary bishops summed up the role of the parishes in Rome in this way:*

*"A parish community has a mission to walk with the whole of humanity and to participate in the earthly destiny of the world. It fulfils its mission if it feels a responsibility for those who live in the neighbourhood and acts upon it by bearing witness to the Gospel and by promoting people's general development. Isn't it at the level of neighbourhoods that the clearest signs of social disintegration and conflict become manifest? So isn't it also there that reconciliation needs to be proclaimed and lived out in the name of Christ and of the love he has for all of us? In this way we can cooperate in the building of human community, so as to build up the people of God together."*

*During the visits to places of hope which are being prepared for the European Meeting, we shall see many examples of this effort towards mission and community.*



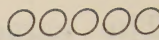
## The universality of the Church

About 250 young adults came from Asia, Africa, South America and Oceania — just a small number in the midst of the whole 40,000 who participated in the meetings between late June and mid-September, but their presence changed a lot.

Their travel costs were borne by 150 parishes and groups in Europe who found imaginative ways of raising the sums needed: "We organized an organ concert, then a show for which we put out posters in the 15 parishes in our area. On Sundays, in front of the church, we put out a map of the world: by buying a piece of coloured paper, everyone could help complete the rainbows that joined the continents together."

Young people who come in this way from other continents stay first at Taizé then go to visit the parishes that have invited them (We should be happy to know of more parishes or groups that would like to be involved).

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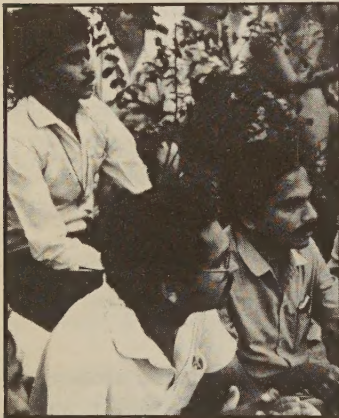
They bore witness to the life of the churches that sent them. A leader of basic communities in the region of indigenous Indians in Southern Mexico; a group of Chinese from Taiwan; a pastoral worker from Fiji; people white and black from Zimbabwe; people from Burma, Pakistan, from every region of India, Lebanon, Ethiopia, Zaire, Peru, Argentina... in all 94 countries.

Europeans from almost every country were present: from the Scandinavians to the Portuguese and Spaniards (whom Brother Roger thanked for being ready to change their habits so as to go to bed early and to get up early!), it was even possible to hear Greek being spoken. Those from Eastern Europe were more numerous than ever before. This year, having been asked by the bishops' conference, the Polish government, for the first time, authorized 800 young people to come to Taizé.

Quite often Church leaders came for one of the common prayers or to stay a few days: the bishop with responsibility for youth work in India, the bishop with responsibility for evangelization in Asia, the cardinal of Lyon, Anglican, Lutheran and Roman Catholic bishops from the United States, Spain, England, Italy, France and Madagascar.

The United Nations were present at the beginning of August in the shape of an aide to the Secretary-General who spoke to everyone: "What is happening here, in a more human and free way, is what happens at the United Nations: representatives of all the peoples of the earth meeting one another." During the winter Mr Perez de Cuellar, the Secretary-General will receive Brother Roger together with children from the five continents in order to learn of the suggestions young people have made about creating trust and peace on earth.

Many people's feeling were expressed when Margaret from Haiti said this: "The universality of the Church is no longer a theoretical notion for me, it is something I have seen. I realized that I do not only belong to the Church of Haiti but to the universal Church." CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



## Each day at five o'clock...

**B**etween the Church of the Reconciliation and the Yellow House, there are two big marquees. It is 5 o'clock. Teatime.

**W**ith a joyful clatter of plastic bowls, a crowd forms around some steaming pots. Things settle gradually; there are now a couple of hundred people, seated on the ground and then on benches behind. The last to arrive stand behind, packed together so as not to miss what is happening. Is it going to be a show? An improvised lecture? In the groups and by word of mouth the news has gone round: at 5 o'clock it's the "Intercontinental Tea". Something not to be missed. Tent A: Asia and Oceania; Tent G: Africa and South America.

**F**or half an hour each day, a small group of young people introduce their country, they say something about its culture and also about their own involvement and hope. Monday: Pakistan and Zaire; Tuesday: South Africa and Syria; Wednesday: The Philippines and Peru; Thursday: India and Chile... what an incredible diversity of faces and voices! Sometimes a map is unfolded, a few words of history said, a legend told, often a song, sometimes a dance, and the scene is set.

**N**obody is there to persuade others or to gain their support. Those who speak, speak of what their eyes have seen and their hands have touched and the words ring true. In Haiti, Chili, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, South Africa, Christians are searching, striving, praying and meeting with one another in order to invent paths of hope. Suffering is present, together with injustice and violence, but there is also courage and solidarity, a tenacious hope and a genius for creativity. The Kenyan speaker knows how to speak of it with wisdom, the Mexican with humour. A fire of the Gospel is burning in all these tales. Those who tell and the ones who ask questions are seeking to discover, to understand, to meet: they realize that the same thirst is within them — Peace to those who are near and peace to those who are far away. The dialogue carries on in hundreds of other conversations during the day, a seed that has been sown to sprout.

**I**n so many villages of the world, when visitors from far away stop to stay for a few days, their coming is celebrated. They are presented to friends and neighbours, people gather round and ask them to introduce themselves.

**D**uring the summer, on this small square of beaten earth underneath the two tented roofs, one could sense that something new was being born; a promise, a fruit, a parable of which we have not yet fully discovered the meaning.



phannine hours are suggested as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer, in the midst of our life at home. During the course of the day (if possible, two days in the same week) take a couple of hours to read the Bible passages with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, the group (3 to 10 people) meet together to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

Even if this archaic story is not fully understandable in all its details, it shows us wonderfully the mystery inherent in a meeting with God. It is a critical moment in the life of Jacob the patriarch: he has learnt that Esau, the brother from whom he stole the blessing of their father Isaac and who has threatened to kill him (Gn 27), is coming to meet him. To ready himself for this fearful meeting, Jacob wants to be alone (vv 23-25). And it is night.

In this helpless state, Jacob meets God. But at the time he does not realize it: his experience is that of wrestling with "someone" during the whole night, someone who refuses to reveal their name. Although he is apparently victorious, Jacob bears the mark of this combat for life (v 26). And the stranger leaves him with two things: a new name and a blessing. In other words, this meeting reveals to him his own true identity and is the source of a new life which will enable him to face up to an unforeseeable future. It is only after the event that Jacob realizes that he has met the living God in this experience of combat through the night.

How can this text help us understand the presence of God in our lives and the consequences of this presence? In the Bible, a name is never just a label, it evokes the reality of a person, their very identity. So why does the stranger not reveal his name to Jacob? Why does he give him a new name? Have we ever had the experience of realizing, after the event, that God had entered into our life? When? Can the experience of inner wrestling be a means of meeting God?

## Meditating on the word

**1 SUN** Revelation 7.2-4,9-14  
1 John 3.1-3

All SAINTS  
Jesus said: Happy those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be filled. Happy the merciful, for mercy will be shown to them. **Matthew 5.1-12**

**2 Mon** 2 Corinthians 8.1-5  
Luke 12.1-4,6-7  
The Lord says: Do what is right and just. Save the exploited from the hands of the oppressor. **Jeremiah 22.1-3**

**3 Tue** Jr 23.1-6  
Lk 12.8,11-12  
Be generous, for you know the generosity of our Lord Jesus Christ who made himself poor for you. **2 Cor 8.7-15**

**4 Wed** 2 Cor 9.6-10,15  
Lk 12.13-21  
The plans I have for you, says the Lord, are plans for peace not for disaster, so as to give you a future and a hope. **Jr 29.11-14**

**5 Thu** Jr 30.12-13,17-19  
2 Cor 11.21-31  
Jesus said: Do not worry about your life. Can any of you, by worrying about it, add a single moment to your span of life? If then such a small thing is beyond your power, why worry about the rest? **Lk 12.22-26**

**6 Fri** Jr 31.3-6  
2 Cor 12.7-10  
Jesus said to his disciples: Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom. **Lk 12.27-31**

**7 Sat** Lk 12.32-34  
The Lord says: I will guide them to streams of water, by a smooth path where they will not stumble. For I am a father to my people. **Jr 31.8-9**

**8 SUN** 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18  
Mt 25.1-13  
The wisdom of God can be seen by those who love her. By those who seek her, she is readily found. **Wisdom 6.12-16**

**9 Mon** Jr 31.11-13  
2 Cor 13.4-13  
Jesus said: Be like people waiting for their master to return, be ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks. **Lk 12.35-44**

**10 Tue** Jr 31.15-20  
Lk 12.49-50,54-56  
Keep yourselves in the love of God as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you eternal life. **Jude 20-21,24-25**

## November

**11 Wed** Romans 1.1-7  
Lk 13.6-9  
The Lord says: I shall give abundantly to the weary and fill those whose strength has gone. **Jr 31.23-26**

**12 Thu** Jr 31.31-34  
Lk 13.10-17  
Paul writes: The Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who has faith. **Rm 1.8-17**

**13 Fri** Jr 32.38-41  
Rm 2.13-15  
Jesus said: The Kingdom of God is like leaven which a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through. **Lk 13.18-21**

**14 Sat** Jr 33.2-3,6-8  
Jesus said: Make every effort to enter by the narrow door. **Lk 13.22-24,31-35**

**15 SUN** Malachi 2.8-10  
Mt 25.14-30  
Paul writes: We thank God continually because when you heard God's word, you accepted it, not as the word of men, but as it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. **1 Th 2.7-13**

**16 Mon** Jr 33.14-16 Lk 14.1-6  
Rm 4.1-8  
When I say, "I am slipping," your faithful love, Lord, supports me. However full of anxiety my heart, you soothe and console me. **Ps 94**

**17 Tue** Zephaniah 3.9-13  
Lk 14.7-11  
God gives life to the dead and calls into existence what does not yet exist. **Rm 4.17b-25**

**18 Wed** Rm 5.1-5  
Lk 14.12-14  
Have no fear, your God is with you. He will quiet you with his love, he will dance with joy for you. **Zp 3.14-18**

**19 Thu** Baruch 3.24-38  
Lk 14.15-23  
The proof of God's love for us is this: that Christ died for us while we were still sinners. Now if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! **Rm 5.6-11**

**20 Fri** Ba 4.36-5.4  
Rm 5.15-21  
Jesus said: Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me, cannot be my disciple. **Lk 14.25-33**

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

**21 Sat** Lk 14.34-35  
God will guide his people in joy by the light of his glory, with the mercy and saving justice which come from him. **Ba 5.7-9**

**22 SUN** Ezekiel 34.11-17  
Mt 25.31-40  
Christ has been raised from the dead, as the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep. Just as all die in Adam, so in Christ all will be brought to life. **1 Cor 15.20-28**

**23 Mon** Zechariah 2.14-17  
Rm 6.4-6  
Jesus said: There is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner. **Lk 15.1-10**

**24 Tue** Zc 8.4-8  
Lk 15.11-24  
Paul writes: Give yourselves to God, as people brought to life from the dead, and give every part of your bodies to God to be instruments of righteousness. **Rm 6.8-14**

**25 Wed** Zc 8.13-17  
Lk 15.25-32  
Paul writes: Now we are released from the Law, having died to what was binding us, and so we are in a new service, that of the Spirit, and not in the old service of a written code. **Rm 6.22-23,7,4-6**

**26 Thu** Rm 8.1-4  
Lk 16.10-16  
Rejoice, cry out for joy! Look, your king is coming. He is just and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey. **Za 9.9-10**

**27 Fri** Zc 12.10,13.1  
Rm 8.5-11  
Jesus said: If your brother wrongs you seven times a day and seven times comes back to you and says, "I repent", forgive him. **Lk 17.3-6**

**28 Sat** Zc 14.5c-9  
Lk 17.7-10  
I rise before dawn and cry for help, Lord, I put my hope in your word. My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, to ponder on your promises. **Ps 119.145-152**

**29 SUN** Is 64.3-7  
Mark 13.33-37  
ADVENT  
Paul writes: You are eagerly waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will continue to give you strength until the very end. **1 Cor 1.3-9**

**30 Mon** Rm 10.9-18  
John 6.1-15  
ST ANDREW  
Jesus saw Simon Peter and Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. And he said to them: Come and follow me, and I will make you fishers of people. **Mt 4.18-22**



# Meditating on the word

## December

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

## Johannine Hours

Luke 2.1-20

**1 Tue** Isaiah 1.2-3, 16-18  
Luke 17.11-19  
Paul writes: You have not received a spirit of slavery to make you fall back into fear; you received the spirit of adoption which enables us to cry out, "Abba, Father!"  
**Romans 8.14-17**

**2 Wed** Is 2.2-5  
Rm 8.18-25  
Jesus said: The coming of the kingdom of God does not admit of observation, because the kingdom of God is within you. **Lk 17.20-25**

**3 Thu** Is 4.2-6  
Lk 18.1-8  
We do not know how to pray properly, but the Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us with sighs that words cannot express.  
**Rm 8.26-30**

**4 Fri** Is 5.1-4  
Lk 18.9-14  
Who can condemn us? Christ Jesus, who died, and more, who was raised from the dead, is at God's right hand interceding for us.  
**Rm 8.31-39**

**5 Sat** Lk 18.15-17  
In a vision, Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send?" And he said, "Here I am, send me."  
**Is 6.1-8**

**6 SUN** Is 40.1-11  
Mark 1.1-8  
Relying on God's promise, we are looking towards a new heaven and a new earth, where justice will dwell.  
**2 Peter 3.8-14**

**7 Mon** Is 7.10-14  
Rm 10.8-13  
Jesus said to a young man: You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.  
**Lk 18.18-27**

**8 Tue** Is 8.11-13a, 17-18  
Rm 11.29-36  
Elizabeth said to Mary: Blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.  
**Lk 1.39-45**

**9 Wed** Rm 12.1-5  
Lk 18.35-43  
The Messiah will not judge according to hearsay, he will judge the weak with justice and give fair sentence for the humble in the land.  
**Is 11.1-4a**

**10 Thu** Is 11.5-9  
Lk 19.1-10  
Be joyful in hope, perseverant in hardship, faithful in prayer; look for opportunities to offer hospitality.  
**Rm 12.6-13**

**11 Fri** Rm 12.14-21  
Lk 19.28-40  
I will trust and will tremble no more, for God is my strength and my song.  
**Is 12.2-6**

**12 Sat** Lk 19.41-42, 45-48  
Lord, you have been a refuge for the weak, a shelter for the needy in distress.  
**Is 25.1, 3-5**

**13 SUN** Is 61.1-2a, 10-11  
John 1.6-8, 19-28  
Paul writes: Always be joyful; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.  
**1 Thessalonians 5.16-24**

**14 Mon** Is 25.6-9  
Lk 21.1-4  
Paul writes: All the commandments are summed up in this: Love your neighbour as yourself.  
**Rm 13.8-10**

**15 Tue** Rm 13.11-14  
Lk 21.8-19  
You level out the straight path of those who are just, Lord. Following the path of your judgements, we set our hope in you, you are the desire of our hearts.  
**Is 26.4-13**

**16 Wed** Is 28.16-17a  
Rm 14.1-13  
Jesus said: Those who are in authority over the nations lord it over them. But for you this must not be so. Instead, the greatest among you should act as if they were the youngest and the one who governs should be like one who serves.  
**Lk 22.24-27**

**17 Thu** Is 29.18-23  
Lk 22.28-34  
May the God of perseverance and encouragement give you all the same purpose, following the example of Christ.  
**Rm 15.1-6**

**18 Fri** Rm 15.7-13  
Lk 1.1-10  
The Lord says: Your salvation is in returning and rest, your strength lies in calm and trust.  
**Is 30.15-18**

**19 Sat** Lk 1.11-25  
Isaiah says: The One who is your teacher will hide no more and you will see him with your eyes. Your ears will hear these words behind you, "This is the way, follow it."  
**Is 30.19-21, 26**

**20 SUN** 2 Samuel 7.1-16  
Rm 16.25-27  
The angel said to Mary: Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus.  
**Lk 1.26-38**

**21 Mon** 2 S 32.15-20  
Lk 1.39-45  
Paul writes: May our fellowship in faith lead you to full knowledge of all the good we can accomplish for Christ.  
Philemon 4-6

**22 Tue** 2 S 35.1-4  
Lk 1.56-66  
You do well to pay attention to the word of the prophets, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. **2 Peter 1.19-21**

**23 Wed** Micah 5.1-4a  
Lk 1.67-80  
Christ is the image of the invisible God, in him all things have been created, in heaven and upon the earth, both the visible and the invisible.  
**Colossians 1.15-20**

**24 Thu** Hebrews 1.1-6  
Matthew 1.18-25  
Isaiah says: For my people I will not be silent, I will not rest until her justice shines out like a bright light.  
Isaiah 62.1-5

**25** eve: Titus 2.11-14 **Lk 2.1-14**  
day: Is 62.11-12 Titus 3.4-7 **Lk 2.15-20**  
**CHRISTMAS**  
To us a child is born, to us a son is given. And this is the name he has been given: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Is 9.1-6

**26 Sat** Is 35.5-10  
Acts 7.55-60  
**ST STEPHEN**  
The Word was the true light, that gives light to everyone. He was in the world.  
**John 1.9-13**

**27 SUN** Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 3.12-14  
Lk 2.22-40  
May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together in one Body.  
**Colossians 3.12-17**

**28 Mon** Ezekiel 36.24-27  
Rm 8.14-17  
Jesus said: Come to me, you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.  
**Matthew 11.25-30**

**29 Tue** Jeremiah 1.4-8  
1 Peter 2.4-5a, 9  
Jesus noticed a tax collector named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me." And leaving everything, Matthew got up and followed him.  
Lk 5.27-32

**30 Wed** Ephesians 2.13-22  
Mark 2.1-12  
The Lord says: I will not forget you, my people. I have dispelled your acts of revolt like a cloud and your sins like a mist. Come back to me, for I have redeemed you.  
Is 44.21-23

**31 Thu** Ex 13.21-22  
Mt 13.31-33  
Paul writes: Forgetting what lies behind, and straining towards what lies ahead, I am racing towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.  
Philippians 3.10-14

At the centre of the story of Jesus' birth, the proclamation of peace on earth made by the angels is addressed to "those God favours". Thus, in Christ Jesus heaven and earth meet, a fullness of communion reunites God and humanity.

For the people of the Bible peace, "shalom", is the common good desired for all. The Hebrew word is richer in meaning than our word "peace": it includes well-being, prosperity, happiness... in other words it evokes a fullness of life. Peace is the gift of God and is a consequence of the covenant with the Lord, and for this reason the prophets attribute its absence to the infidelity of the people (Isaiah 48.18). So there is always an expectant hope for God to intervene afresh: he will repair the misdeeds of the past, giving a secure peace to his people and even the entire world. The expectation is for a Messiah who is "Prince of Peace" (Is 9.5), a humble king who will establish peace "from sea to sea" (Zechariah 9.9-10).

It is this expectation which according to St Luke, is fulfilled in Jesus. And yet suffering also has a place in the story (the journey to Bethlehem, the lack of room in the inn); there is poverty (shepherds were practically excluded from society, scorned by all) and darkness. In the reign of peace has come, then it is not as we so often imagine it: Jesus brings peace to the earth (cf. 2 Cor 5.17-20; Eph 2.14-18), but not automatically, as if by magic or by enforcing himself violently. His presence among human beings is discreet and nevertheless endowed with its own effectiveness, like the almost invisible leaven which, little by little, transforms all the dough (Mt 13.33).? How does the story help me to understand the way in which God acts in the world to give his peace? In what ways does the picture of a little child correspond to the ways in which God acts? Where is peace needed around me? How can I receive the peace of God and bear it to others?



**"** "In St Ireneus' parish in Lyon, I saw how parishioners undertook to welcome students, both foreign and French, from the university hall of residence located in their area. Everything started very simply: first of all some small discussion groups at the end of the Sunday mass, then friendly invitations to Sunday lunch or to weekend outings.

## African students in Lyon

One day the mass was prepared by the students, who were able to express themselves by gestures, prayers and songs. To cement the links of friendship, the parishioners had prepared a meal in the church hall. We did this three times. An active friendship developed between the people of the parish and the students and, at the same time, a new sense of community arose both in the parish itself and between the students.

Some small groups of students were formed at the university, bringing together both Christians and Muslims. We spoke together about faith, and some people from the parish came to join us. Several times, Muslims came to the parish centre and were welcomed without discrimination.

The people of the parish realized the loneliness of overseas students and arranged for students who wished to be put in contact with a family. At Christmas, a message was put into the 1,100 letter boxes of the students' residence to invite all those who were going to be alone to share Christmas lunch with a family. Students who are far away from home are particularly touched by the joyful welcome of children.

This parish has also opened itself to other social concerns, in particular welcoming homeless people at the door of the church and assisting North African families who have lost their accommodation.

As for us, the students, we invited the people of the parish to come one evening to the student residence. To help them understand our life, we first took them to see the building and to visit our rooms. On the walls some had written messages: "You have made a pilgrimage to visit us", "Your presence in the student block is a sign of your welcome to those different from yourselves", "It is not we who welcome you, you are welcoming us in the name of Jesus Christ". Then we gave them a simple meal, followed by some slides about Cameroon and a dance from Réunion. Until that evening, no one had ever seen people from the surrounding district in our university residence. **"**

During the meetings at 5 o'clock, Domingos from Guinea-Bissau told how a parish was renewed as it welcomed African students.

## The intercontinental meetings will continue

The intercontinental meetings did not end on September 13 as had been thought. They have been so important that they are like a new starting point and will be kept going throughout the winter. From now on, every week of the year will be intercontinental.

Some young people from Africa, Asia and South America were already planning to come towards the end of the year, since in some parts of the Southern hemisphere the long holidays are from December to March. Thanks to these longer stays, they will be able to participate in an awakening of faith in Europe. After a stay at Taizé, they can go from one parish to another in Europe to share the way in which they live out the Gospel in their own countries. They will communicate something of their enthusiasm and freshness, and at the same time they will discover something in Europe to take back to their own countries. Two people from Zaïre underlined this reciprocity. One of them said, "We are from the South and are going back there, but we will remain in touch with our friends in the Northern hemisphere to encourage them and to participate in the awakening of Europe." The other added, "I had thought that all Europeans were materialists. But now I have seen that there are many who pray and seek God. I will take back something new for the life of my people in Zaïre."

At the end of August, a number of Indians, while they were making visits to parishes in Rome, went to the general audience with the Pope that is held every week. John Paul II made a point of welcoming this "group of young Indians who have been participating in the intercontinental meetings at Taizé", and he greeted each of them individually.

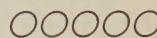
## Inner life and human solidarity

These are the two central themes of the intercontinental meetings: two things that each participant is called to pursue at home in order to continue a pilgrimage of trust.

At Taizé, an inner life is built up by the thrice daily common prayer. The bible introductions given by the brothers, which are followed by periods of silence, are one kind of nourishment. When one has returned home, "Johannine hours" are a way to continue this deepening of faith.

The worldwide human solidarity of which we have become aware by listening to people from other continents and by thinking about the questions put to the United Nations, takes

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4



form at home through an openness to the people who live around us. As an example of this, the story of a young student from Guinea-Bissau shows how the life of a parish was transformed when it began welcoming overseas students (see above).

The meetings at Taizé help us see that we are not alone in a pilgrimage of trust on earth. The same experience can be had more locally when people from one region gather, for example for a day or evening of prayer and reflection on a part of the letter "Living Springs". Such a gathering will turn us towards the next step in common on our pilgrimage: the European Meeting in Rome, from 28th December to 2nd January.







## Listening to the CONTINENTS

### MEXICO

"I am Diego, I come from Chiapas in southern Mexico. I was born among peasant farmers who do not speak Spanish but 'Toctfil', an Indian language. My work in the diocese is to visit villages to help build up a Christian community consciousness. One often has to walk for hours to reach a village: they are cut off from everything. We work to train local community leaders by Bible study together and by building an awareness of their situation. Another job that needs to be done concerns health education and teaching the value of medicinal plants.

One of the big obstacles we meet is religious sects. They are very active in the villages and create division and confusion among poor people. They often take hold among the very poorest groups, and make it difficult for cooperation to develop.

There are signs of hope, of unity and organisation among the people with whom I work, even though they are economically very poor. They do not have enough land to till. As there are no local government services, we organise work that needs doing in the community as well as cooperatives for buying and production."

### INDIA

"You have probably heard of Madras where the first Intercontinental Meeting was held", says Sharon, who comes from the district of Shastrinagar, "During the period before the meeting we used to meet every month. These meetings brought together Christians of all denominations, and this was something unique. We had Catholics, CSI (Church of South India), Lutherans, Syrian Orthodox — all working together. The Madras meeting was also unique, because not only Christians took part, but we also had a lot of non-Christians; I mean Hindus and Muslims. Welcoming people from all over the world to stay with our families was another beautiful experience for us. What we read in the news-

papers will not be impersonal any more, for we know we have parts of our families all over the world and that makes it more personal..."

"I'd like to say something about Shastrinagar", continues John Bosco, "The people there are all former refugees. They came from Burma in 1962 and settled in a place where there is a big pond that collects waste water from the city. And now in Shastrinagar there are 2000 huts, 600 are inhabited by Catholic families, the others by Hindu families. When we started to build a church, they built a Hindu temple next to it. In the beginning everything went well. We felt we were brothers and sisters from Burma. Later, tensions began to grow up between our communities. We felt that, under these circumstances, at least the youngsters should come together and build unity among ourselves and with Hindu families. This was the starting point of a small youth group in 1984. Then 1985 was proclaimed International Youth Year by the United Nations and at the same time preparation for the Madras meeting started.

During the preparation of the Madras meeting we never got any support from our elders, because they thought we were going to land in trouble with our Hindu brothers. But we continued and we said to them, "No, we youngsters will build and develop ourselves and have peace among us in the future." The Madras meeting was an important turning point for us. We prepared a tent to invite our friends from Europe and from other parts. The very moment they were with us, the elders felt something extraordinary and started to support and to help us a lot throughout the whole meeting. That brought unity between the elders and the youngsters which still lasts. For this reason we are here now and bring you the greetings from our elders.

In order to continue this wonderful experience, we go on working in our parish with youngsters. We have various programmes for about 600 children. Fourteen young people look after them. Our catechism classes involve human values, and we insist on the need for peace in our people. We also have some training centres, where we give technical training, and a medical centre which takes care of both Hindus and Christians."

### SWEDEN

"Thank you for the flower that Brother Roger gave at Easter to the Swedes who had come to Taizé! Here is its story. We had a long way to travel back home and quite heavy rucksacks to carry and... there was the flower: a tall and easily damaged potted plant with yellow flowers and a strong smell. Everyone looked after it. We managed to transport it in buses, trains, the Paris metro, on boats and in cars. If ever we were in danger of losing one another in the crowd, all we had to do was to look around for the yellow flowers waving above all the heads!

What to do with the flower? We belong to a very big parish with four churches. We've all felt quite lost in the church, and not many of us have been active members for years. Therefore, we were a bit unsure where we should place the flower. We decided to choose the smallest church, recently opened in an old farmhouse. When we told the pastor there about the flower, she was very happy and wanted a continuation

of all that the flower symbolises. On Sunday 10th May, we had a celebration where explained about the flower, prayed in silence and sang some chants. The flower was well received. Finally, Spring has also come to Sweden now, and for us perhaps the Spring within has finally found a place where it can flourish.

### FIJI

"108 years ago, the first missionaries came to Fiji, Leone explained. They were English Methodists. They had some knowledge of how the Fijian people lived. They met the king on each island and converted him to Christianity. The people being loyal to the king, everyone was converted. Five years later, the first French missionaries arrived. In the meantime, the Methodist missionaries had been converting people around the coasts, so the French went on to the interior where they introduced Catholicism. As time went on, there was a lot of intermarriage between the two, so we have a real mixture of Catholics and Methodists all over the country.

Fijians have a traditional drink called Kava. They believe there is something powerful in it. It is made from the flesh of a plant that takes five years to mature. It is used for welcomes and farewells, and as a sign of belonging to a community. It is used also in reconciliation: if I have a problem with another community and want to be reconciled, I have to see my chief and follow our customs. The chief will send his intermediary to the other group to inform them about the misunderstanding, and the chiefs decide on the day the reconciliation can be done. If I am guilty, I will present my gift to the person I have hurt. The chief will accept that on behalf of everybody and then they will present theirs, informing that they have accepted the reconciliation. Once that is done, the Kava that both sides have brought are mixed together as one and drunk."

## Letter from Taizé

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